Women's Studies, 42:369–389, 2013
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ISSN: 0049-7878 print / 1547-7045 online
DOI: 10.1080/00497878.2013.773196

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

CATTERINA DeCARLO DAVIA—A WEST VIRGINIA DONKEY

JOSEPH L. TROPEA
Brigantine, New Jersey and Buenos Aires, Argentina

> The tents were soon filled with the lifeless bodies of ghastly men: there were bodies without arms; bodies without legs; bodies without heads; heads without bodies. On every hand there were weeping fathers and mothers, wailing wives and sobbing little children, and scenes of horror and outbursts of agony so heartrending that earth has no language adequate to describe them.[1]

Over 360 miners died in Monongah, West Virginia, the morning of December 6, 1907—making it the greatest U.S. mining disaster.[2] After the underground explosions were exhausted, bodies were left scattered and splattered in Fairmont Coal mines, numbers six and eight, some in pieces so small recognition was impossible.[3] Those few seconds of devastation killed men folk and challenged the survival of hundreds of their dependents. This disaster drove industrial reform and charitable efforts, but no historical work on the Monongah survivors. The mainly foreign, widowed, and illiterate women, responsible for hundreds of children, many yet unborn, had few resources, kin across the ocean, and no effective

The author would like to acknowledge Janet Salvati, James Davia, Sara Vecchiato, Donna Gabaccia, Mary Elizabeth Brown, Center for Migration Studies, and the staff of The West Virginia and Regional History Collection for their support and to Domenico Porpiglia, Editor, GENTE D'ITALIA, whose gift enabled research travel in 2007.

Address correspondence to Joseph L. Tropea, 4822 Ross Dr. S, Brigantine, NJ 08203. E-mail: tropea@gwmail.gwu.edu

[1]Neely.

[2]Tropea 2008; West Virginia Legislature 396; Monongah Mines Relief Committee (MMRC). The MMRC collection includes folders for each of the miners, correspondence, maps, rescuers' notes, summary of beneficiaries and moneys distributed, and much more.

[3]West Virginia Legislature; Kellogg; Haas 13.

language to communicate uncertainties.[4] Their fears and sorrows, expressed in regional dialects and unsettling dins, provided post-explosion spectacles for observers and text for the press—but foreign wails, expressions, and bearings earmarked a social distance, which discouraged approach.[5] Their lives remain elusive. Within a generation, the explosions and their aftermath even eluded family memories. The author met in Italy with a granddaughter of one of the Italians who survived the explosions and she was unaware of West Virginia and the explosions. Catterina's family, also, was unaware of much of her history, presented in this article. Worse still, memories that remain may parody, not illuminate, the struggles of those vulnerable women, like Catterina DeCarlo Davia.

Italians comprised almost half of the miners reported to have died in the mines. All but two of these 171 men were from south Italy.[6] Most of their widows in the United States, unlike Catterina, had immediate family in West Virginia or, at least, *paesani* (persons from a common village). Catterina was from north Italy; she did not understand southern dialects.[7] When her husband, Vittorio Davia, died that cold December morning, Catterina was left the lone adult with five children in Fairmont Coal Company House Number 120, with few resources, and remote from other Italians.[8] Her situation was made even worse by viewing body parts, officially claimed to be Vittorio's but which Catterina avowed were not his.[9] The Monongah explosions, like many mine disasters, devastated the spirits of many persons, but long-term afflictions went largely unrecorded—except for Catterina. She became part of local lore for her seemingly senseless, excessive, collection of tons of coal, which she gathered for many years and deposited in her yard, much unused. This behavior, reflected in a captioned cartoon, part of a syndicated series, "Strange as it Seems", secured Catterina's major attribute in the collective memory: bizarre coal

[4]MMRC (DeShields letter to Mayor Moore, January 6, 1908).
[5]Kellogg 1317.
[6]MMRC.
[7]Davia.
[8]MMRC (survey).
[9]DeMary, 2007–2012.

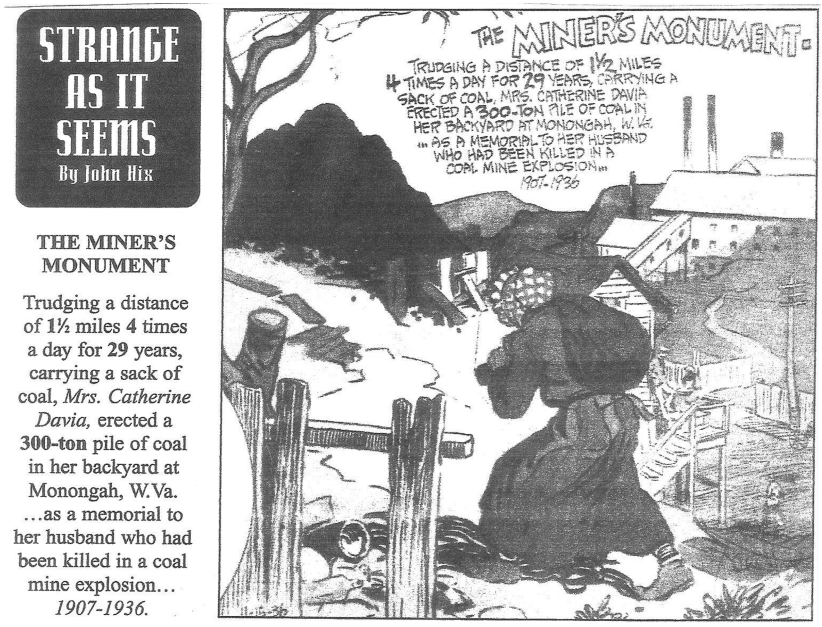
STRANGE AS IT SEEMS
By John Rix
THE MINER'S MONUMENT
Trudging a distance of 1½ miles 4 times a day for 29 years, carrying a sack of coal, *Mrs. Catherine Davia,* erected a 300-ton pile of coal in her backyard at Monongah, W.Va. …as a memorial to her husband who had been killed in a coal mine explosion… *1907-1936.*
THE MINER'S MONUMENT.
TRUDGING A DISTANCE OF 1½ MILES 4 TIMES A DAY FOR 29 YEARS, CARRYING A SACK OF COAL, MRS. CATHERINE DAVIA ERECTED A 300-TON PILE OF COAL IN HER BACKYARD AT MONONGAH, W. VA. "AS A MEMORIAL TO HER HUSBAND WHO HAD BEEN KILLED IN A COAL MINE EXPLOSION" 1907-1936

FIGURE 1 "Strange as it Seems".

collector.[10] With her identity so fixed, her life and character were not explored.

Many memories of the Monongah disaster were lost or distorted in their telling or incorrectly recorded in print or memorials.[11] Research provided little ballast to oral traditions that offered as much theater as understanding. It was easy for the native-born to perceive and recall the odd in immigrants, like Catterina, but this was reinforced by her compatriots. Shouts of *Ciuccia Catterina* (donkey Catterina) accompanied her coal-collecting routine. It is not surprising that Catterina's peculiarity, personified in the press, affirmed in its daily exercise, and accentuated by mockery, dominated the memory of local people.[12] Her legacy remained little more than a bizarre old lady, daily carrying sacks of coal from mine to yard; a woman who lost her mind when

[10] "Strange as It Seems."
[11] Tropea "Revisiting".
[12] DeMary, 2007; Shenasky.

she lost her husband in the explosions. Indeed, Catterina, suddenly widowed by the mine disaster, faced not only the explosions' immediate aftermath but also their continuing reverberations, amplified, sharpened, and prolonged by her immigrant status, five children, and taunting locals. This research documents the trials Catterina faced but, more importantly, uncovers the actions she took in confronting them. Documenting her saga of travail provides more substance to Catterina's life, which challenges both her paltry legacy and notions of a "lost mind." Uncovering Catterina's decency, dedication, and spunk suggests what may be ensconced in the lives of many immigrant women, who, too, were trampled upon but whose character will likely remain unrevealed.

Many women widowed by mining disasters experience financial and emotional duress, and some, as a result, develop long-term afflictions. Still, disaster-induced symptoms are not a substitute for biographical knowledge, knowledge of the trials a woman faced and the responses she made to them. Actions—not frailties—substantiate character. If the logic of a woman's apparent irrationalities cannot be fathomed, they may, in the least, be empathetically framed by her struggles. Such validation is mainly relegated to family lore. However, primary-source materials, as well as family memory, enabled authentication of Catterina's nature. These reveal a courageous, even clever woman whose character was evidenced in how she dealt with her trials—not in her coal-collecting behavior. Catterina's decisions and actions challenge memories of a senseless old woman; they also challenge chauvinist views of mining widows, shown by company men, the press, and clergy.[13] Research on Catterina offers substance to an otherwise vacuous monument dedicated to the Monongah "heroine," as well as castigates disdainful memories, story-telling, and caricatures. Knowledge of Catterina's life indicts both the innocence and ignorance in our memories and memorials devoted to miners and their kin.

Catterina DeCarlo and Vittorio Davia were born a few kilometers apart, she in Grea, he in Vallesella, both parts of Domegge, a commune in the province of Belluno in the region of Veneto, less than 20 miles from the Austrian border. Catterina was born November 21, 1864 to Domenico DeCarlo and Bartola Frescura

[13]Haas 18–19; Kellogg 1317; Center for Migration Studies (general correspondence in which the priest, D'Andrea, used a derogatory expression, "vidovelle," for the widows).

and Vittorio, October 29, 1866 to Virgilio Davia and Maria Luigia Fedon.[14] While four siblings were born to Vittorio's mother and father, death notifications and family memories indicate Vittorio's siblings did not survive childhood. [15] In October 1887, after the death of his father when Vittorio acquired majority legal status and responsibility for his widowed mother, he secured a travel document to exit Italy for Switzerland. In 1889, Vittorio secured another travel document, this time to go to Argentina. Since Vittorio was responsible for his widowed mother, the travel documents were presumably for purposes of work; still, there is no evidence that he departed for either Switzerland or Argentina. However, in 1891, Vittorio secured a travel document to go to the United States, destined for Pennsylvania. [16]

Catterina arrived at Ellis Island on March 12, 1894, accompanied by a five-year-old girl, Pietrina, daughter of a cousin, Virginia and her husband, Antonio, who lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; both of these cousins were also from Domegge.[17] At this time, Vittorio was working as a miner in Goshen, Ohio, a few hours train ride from Pittsburgh. While no evidence indicates a prior relationship between Vittorio and Virginia or her husband Antonio, or, even, Catterina, there was a social network of paesani that provided opportunity for Catterina and Vittorio to meet.[18] Six months after her arrival, Catterina married Vittorio, on September 22, 1894, at Immaculate Conception Church in Dennison, Ohio, a short distance from Goshen, Vittorio's place of residence as well as work.[19] A photograph taken in Fairmont, West Virginia, about five miles from Monongah, shows the couple near the time of their marriage.[20] By 1895, Catterina and Vittorio were in Monongah, the birth place of their five children, Faustina, Oreste, Kipling, Giordano, and Eugenio; all were living in Monongah at the time of the explosion.

Vittorio was working as a "day man," someone who received payment for work performed, not for weight of coal mined. He

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[14]Baptizatorum N.pag. Birth year is incorrect in U.S. records and on grave stone.

[15]Ibid. This confirms family memories.

[16]Copies of applications provided by Dr. James Davia; MMRC (Davia folder).

[17]Ellis Island.

[18]Ibid. Many immigrants from Domegge had the surname, Frescura, and indicated "Pittsburgh" as their destination and "miner" as their work.

[19]"Registrum Matrimoniorum;" "Certificate of Marriage."

[20]Photograph provided by Dr. James Davia.

FIGURE 2 Catterina and Vittorio, Fairmont, West Virginia, circa 1894–95.

was working in mine number 6, Friday morning, when the mines exploded. Marginal notes suggested he was a U.S. citizen but no naturalization documents were found. His body was the fifteenth recovered, likely Monday morning, and was buried that very day; the location of his remains, in Row A of the Italian cemetery, also indicates an early recovery of the body. When taken from the mines, many bodies were not intact; some were not even recognizable. This seems to have been the case with Vittorio's body, whose

identification was made "at church"; while not an uncommon occurrence in the post-explosion confusion, no one is on record as having identified Vittorio's body.[21] This offers some support for what we were informed: Catterina never accepted the body parts as those of her husband and believed to her end that Vittorio remained in the mine.[22] Nonetheless, Vittorio was buried in Row A Grave 9.

Catterina's deep grief over the loss of her husband and father of her children certainly would have been even more embittered by the exhibition of unrecognizable body parts and conflict over their identification. Such sorrow, confusion, and bitterness likely nurtured her belief that Vittorio remained in the mine. Her disconsolate disposition was seemingly evident when people came to the door of house number 120, not too many days after the explosion; they were there to conduct a survey of the miners' dependents for the charity committee. While Catterina's disposition was forged by a most tragic event, whose imponderables continued to haunt, the survey people recorded curt, patronizing, and sarcastic comments about her, made more out of spite than empathy. Their comments indicate Catterina had "No" intelligence, was "Not very" clean, exhibited "No" thrift, had "No" savings, an "insane temper," and "not very good sense"—though her health was "Good" and her command of English, "Fairly good." Given these remarks, it is not surprising the survey people seemed to abandon Catterina in her misery; they concluded, "Anyhow, think for the present woman better be left to herself while her money lasts."[23]

Compassion may have been exhausted in Monongah that December. Its absence was certainly felt by persons like Catterina. Yet, her five children depended on her resolve, not her wanting heart. Such resolve was tested. The meeting—or confrontation—with the survey people represented, for most of the widows, their first serious encounter with overseers. The committee's curt comments about Catterina indicate the imbalance of power and rudeness in the exchange, likely shown in meetings with other immigrant widows, all at a vulnerable point in their lives. Sorrow

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[21] MMRC (untitled list of miners' ordered in sequence of the bodies' removal from the mines). MMRC (Davia folder) and (list of miners on sheet, "Italian Cemetery Row A)."

[22] DeMary, 2007 and 2012.

[23] MMRC (Davia folder) and (survey of House Number 120).

and the absence of power—of resources, mate, and language—shrouded the widows' encounters with the surveyors. The surveyors' intervention also brought disgrace, as well as threat, particularly for foreign widows who were required to expose self, children, and future to American strangers. Though disadvantaged in such encounters, the widows, nonetheless, had to respond, less they receive more mistreatment. While they endured and accommodated questioning by coal power's representatives, the widows had to try and moderate what they perceived as threats to their lives and those of their children, as well as preserve whatever family sanctity remained. Their situation of little power, brusque interrogation, sorrow, and disgrace, framed a dilemma for the widows: responsibilities to make intentions public and to respect private fears.

For the Monongah widows, meeting with the surveyors represented more than a survey; it was a risky encounter, for it would shape their lives in unknown ways. Though the survey largely dictated the widows' responses, their responses were but the little influence they had in the encounter. So, they invariably responded "No" to questions about resources, including money. Muddied responses distanced the widows from the interrogators, safeguarded what remained of resources and spirit, and initiated them into a world they could not control but to which they need not succumb. Deceit, a long-taught tactic for dealing with the powerful, served the widows in their meeting with the interrogators; however cautiously exercised, it helped the widows in the start of their unenviable journey. Whether goaded by strangers in the house, the survey's expectations, a sense of pride, belief in family sanctity, or some other reason, Catterina communicated a decision to the surveyors—muddied or not: "Wants to stay in Monongah. No one in Italy."[24]

Catterina's response may suggest admirable tenacity or feigned intention, prompted by unsympathetic surveyors. Still, tenacity of the widows would be required, tenacity that might be transformed with insight. Their resolve needed to be supple and firm, as the "rules of the game" were made, and remade, by others. When inflexibility held survival risks, it would have to be recast

[24]MMRC (Davia folder).

or abandoned. Yet, Monongah's foreign widows could not simply shed world views and behaviors, long-linked to survival. They might not comport with overseers' expectations or abandon old ways of survival. Most poor people, like Catterina and the other Monongah widows, had long learned that assets had to be conserved, not dissipated, but that asset accumulation and use were, in large part, not under their control. This learning was affirmed when the mines exploded. Conditions for survival changed but not a deep-seated reasoning, long-nurtured by the absence of resources and confidence; a logic that guided responses to material conditions and to those in power. But those in power did not cipher the reasoning of the foreign poor; they did not reckon its impact on actions or intentions. Cultural differences clouded the surveyors' description of Catterina; as well, they affected overseers' accounts of immigrants in their other administered efforts to quell crises and chaos. Immigrants' anxieties, actions, and confusions, wrought by disorder and flaw in body identification and mass burial, were neither fathomed nor respected; instead, the behavior of foreigners provoked searing commentary, "on the ignorance of some of the bereaved."[25] Poor and alien unfortunates, lacking information on their loved ones, incinerated, crushed, and asphyxiated under foreign soil, were viewed as lacking sense and ridiculed, even condemned.

Compounding the cultural divisions and bias the widows confronted was the knowledge, commonly and long-held, that associated poor people with poor planning. This knowledge was exercised when overseers hastily imposed administrative rationality in many instances, while widespread grief and uncertainty prevailed—when the surveyors knocked at the widows' doors, prodding them for a plan. Foreign widows, living on material margins, under harried and horrendous conditions, with deep anguish, and continuing and overwhelming threats and confusion, were expected to have formulated a plan for their future; indeed, they were judged by this ability to plan—for it aided decision-making by resource-givers. This forced conflation of administrative and personal ends and exacerbated cultural differences; it reaffirmed older logics and provoked deception.[26]

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[25]Haas 18.

[26]Tropea "From Mountain to Mine" 139.

When the charity committee surveyors arrived at her door, Catterina likely had no plan within which decisions could be made, maybe not even a partial plan for herself and her children. Still, when impelled by expectations of the powerful, many poor people exercise a cunning crafted by their disadvantage: they pretend. Women, of necessity best-practiced in such cunning, may have feigned a rationality, by which they knew the Americans would judge them. Whether for compliance, contrivance, or commitment, Catterina offered the committee a goal, "stay in Monongah," and a rationale, "No one in Italy."

The charity committee and the coal company tried to control post-explosion events and orchestrated responses to help them. Catterina, like many other widows, obliged. However, the overseers' needs for administration and the widows' needs for their own agency were not to be confused. Amidst the welter of misery, confusion, bias, condemnation, and administrative provocation, Catterina needed to find her own way, to control grief's impulses and, at least for the children, to try and think of what to do—to show resolve, however events might come to reshape it. There were few options for a poor, suddenly widowed, and foreign woman, living in a company house in a largely company town, with five children. Still, feelings and thoughts will settle in the heart and mind and can be nurtured, even in the hard ground of limited resources, with much sorrow and confusion's discords. These are not a plan; they are sentiments and reflections that can restore resolve and help a woman change her mind.

On Thursday evening, December 12, representatives of the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission arrived in Monongah. They were the force and efficiency behind the creation of the MMRC, the composition of its board, and the drafting of a letter of solicitation for resources that would be forwarded under the auspices of the MMRC—tasks completed by Saturday, December 14, only eight days after the explosions.[27] The Commission also contributed $35,000 to the MMRC for the relief of miners' dependents.[28] In this way, an administrative structure, with rules for getting and giving, was established. The Commission not only provided the locals a rational system for taking action but also

[27]Carnegie Hero Fund Commission (Wilmot Report).
[28]Ibid. (Executive Committee resolution).

insisted on an MMRC board of religious inclusiveness, heretofore not evident by the local powers.[29] Within a brief period of time, the MMRC made a decision, in early January, about a month after the explosions, to begin releasing some monies to those left dependent by the explosions, at least those living in the Monongah area.[30] This decision, while not overly magnanimous, changed the rules of the game and prospects for living. For almost a month after the explosion, the widows had been dependent on in-kind relief. The MMRC, by providing cash for day-to-day survival and prospects of a future financial settlement, enabled resource-based judgments on the part of the widows, not survey-induced responses of little substance. Catterina received her first cash allotment of $4.50 on January 8, 1908. This amount would be received weekly while contributions to the MMRC continued to accumulate and until a decision was made on a final settlement.[31] While the MMRC's expeditious allotment of cash suggests efficiency, the allotments benefitted the Fairmont Coal Company, as well as the miners' dependents: the Company's in-kind contributions of supplies and fuel stopped, once the MMRC released its weekly cash allotments.[32]

The amount of cash Catterina received was meager, much less than Victor would have contributed to the family.[33] Still, for some months, it was the "life line" for her and her children. This money may have met basic needs but it, and the absence of social resources, suggests Catterina's limited options. Indeed, it was likely during this time that Catterina lost a child to starvation.[34] However, with knowledge of a pending settlement, options would change and so would Catterina's mind. She made plans to return to Italy, even before the MMRC settlement check was issued. Also, Catterina likely planned to return to the United States. This is indicated by the copy of her Ohio marriage certificate that she

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[29]Carnegie Hero Fund Commission (Wilmot Report); Tropea "Hero Fund".

[30]MMRC (Davia Folder) and (MMRC letter to E.N. Clopper, December 28, 1908).

[31]MMRC (Davia folder).

[32]MMRC (MMRC letter to E.N. Clopper, December 28, 1908); Haas 20.

[33]MMRC. Note pad for March, 2007 provides a range of day rates from $1.50 to $2.80 for 29 day men. Vittorio was likely at the high end because he had worked in the mines since 1895.

[34]Davia, James; Davia, Ronald. Both remember talk of the death of a sixth child but were not certain of the child's place in the birth order; no records could be found.

took to Italy. A request for this copy would have been made some days prior to the date of the issuance of the settlement check, for the copy was certified on August 20—in Ohio.[35] A copy of her marriage certificate was important for Caterina to demonstrate to the Italian authorities that "her children were legitimate and that she was a mother/woman of good character."[36] The Italian authorities would use this document to prepare her passport for return to the United States. Also, without proof of citizenship, the marriage license would help establish, in the least, "nonimmigrant alien" status at Ellis Island, as well as the legitimacy of her children. The MMRC monies enabled Catterina's determination but her foresight, illustrated by her preparations, implicates something else: Catterina's tenacity seems to have been sharpened by a resolve that she and her children would no longer continue as passive victims—a resolve that would be tested in a few months in Italy. After the MMRC made a decision on final settlements, sometime during the middle of August, a check was printed for "Mrs. Caterina De Carlo Davia" for the amount of $835.50; she cashed the check on August 24.[37] These monies released Catterina's energies. She responded with what seems like a frenzied series of decisions and actions that would change and challenge the course of her life and those of her five children.

Catterina's shock and sorrow, following the explosions, and the subsequent months of dependence on weekly allotments of $4.50 seem to have focused her determination and critical assessment of what she might face and what she must do to protect and provide for her children. Making provisions for her return to the United States through use of the Ohio wedding certificate, for presentation to relevant government authorities in Italy and the United States, is a pivotal illustration. Such personal mobilization underlies what otherwise might appear as a frenetic, even random, schedule of events and decisions. After receiving the August settlement check, Catterina and her children left for Italy. They traversed the Appalachian Mountains, Atlantic Ocean, northern France, and the Italian Alps to settle in an impoverished Domegge, in the Dolomite Mountains, in winter's cold.

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[35]MMRC files; Ufficio Anagrafe Domegge N.pag.

[36]Gabaccia 2012.

[37]MMRC (Davia folder).

The poverty in Domegge, during the period of Catterina's stay, is still legend, with unflavored polenta consumed, as the primary, if not only, staple; for some flavor, we were told, a salted fish would be hand-held and passed through the corn meal mush.[38] Such poverty does not enable much by way of accommodating a woman and her five children. Catterina's stay in Domegge was difficult, as she would later tell.[39] In addition to the physical and social distress, loomed the possible dissipation of the Monongah monies—which fact and fear, a widow with five children would have prudently kept to herself. It did not take much time in Domegge for Catterina to decide to return to the United States.

After a departure decision was made, within a brief period of time and in a prescribed legal-administrative sequence, Catterina secured necessary authorizations for her travel: December 19, a certificate of her Ohio marriage was presented to the Domegge commune;[40] December 27, her Italian passport was stamped in Pieve di Cadore; December 29, her medical authorization for travel was completed in Domegge.[41] Shortly thereafter, in the midst of winter, Catterina and her children made their second voyage across northern Italy to France, where they departed from Le Havre, January 23; approximately four months after their departure from Monongah, they arrived at Ellis Island, February 1, 1909.[42] Unfortunately, the arrival of the wearied and sickened travelers met with more travail.

When Catterina and the children returned to the United States, they were not allowed to enter; instead, they were detained for medical reasons. After the family had been held on Ellis Island for two weeks, the eldest child and only daughter, Faustina, was admitted to the hospital. The next day, Catterina and the four boys were "paroled to Rev. Moretto" of the *Societa' San Raffaele per Gl'Immigranti Italiani*. However, they were returned to Ellis Island in less than a day and, then, within two hours, Catterina and three of her boys were also admitted to the hospital.[43] Added to

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[38] Non-scheduled interviews during Domegge research visit, December 2007.

[39] *Societa'* 16–17.

[40] Ufficio Anagrafe.

[41] Passport copy provided by James Davia. Medical authorization copy provided by comune in Domegge.

[42] Ellis Island. (La Gascogne manifest, February 1, 1909.)

[43] Ibid. and "Records of Aliens Held for Special Inquiry."

these delays and medical convolutions, was an unexpected legal problem: proof of citizenship was lacking for three of the children. While Catterina planned well for her return to the United States, she did not—indeed, could not—do the same for her U.S.-born children; she likely assumed their entrance into the United States would not be a problem. Fortunately for Catterina, the *Societa'* was moved by her difficulties and worked to secure legal documentation for the children; however, the *Societa'* succeeded for only two of the children. Skeptical about attaining effective birth documentation from West Virginia for the three remaining children, the *Societa'* used witnesses and an affidavit to convince Ellis Island authorities of Catterina's veracity and the citizenship of the remaining children.[44] While the society's personnel aided Catterina's family, she and the children likely stayed at the facility of the Pallottine Sisters of Charity, until legal problems were solved and authorization to depart was secured.[45] The Society was correct in their assessment of records: no birth records could be found in Marion County, West Virginia, for the three children in question.

Then, almost four weeks after her admission to the hospital, Faustina was released and five days later, on Wednesday, March 17, one and a half months after arrival at Ellis Island, the family was admitted to the United States. Only then, were they able to continue their return to Monongah—but not before Catterina and her children were photographed, prior to their departure.[46] However, what Catterina did in Monongah is as perplexing as the Ellis Island events: on Thursday, April 1, 1909, two weeks—likely less—after leaving New York, Catterina completed settlement on the purchase of a house in Monongah.[47]

While purchase of the house suggests survival foresight—the deed allocates half ownership to Catterina and half to her children—it is perplexing on two counts, at least: the rapid completion of the transaction and the wherewithal in resources for the purchase. The latter, is the most striking—and may cast doubt on Catterina, as the cost of the house was $1,000 and it was purchased, "cash in hand." Because too many facets of Catterina's life

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[44] *Societa*' 16–17.

[45] Brown 171 and personal communication with Brown.

[46] *Societa*' 16.

[47] Office of County Clerk.

FIGURE 3 Catterina and her children, Faustina, Oreste, Kipling, Giordano, Eugenio, New York, 1909.

were left to ignorance, ill treatment, bad memory, or doubt, some effort will be made to explain Catterina's ability to purchase the Monongah house. It is not proof; it is as much an account of character as finance, but it points to the cobbling Catterina would have had to exercise to secure a house for her family.

The best financial scenario, expending approximately $400 for the round trip from Monongah to Domegge and incurring no living costs in Italy, would have left Catterina with a little over $400 remaining from the MMRC monies. While Catterina did not disclose any savings to the MMRC surveyors, they recognized she had some by their statement, "while her money lasts." Such money would have been kept, or not greatly expended, because Catterina received the coal company's cash-in-kind contributions until the $4.50 weekly allotments began, a month after the explosion. In addition, if the company, in its own settlement with the widows, provided Catterina the reported $150 for herself

and $75 for each child, this would have added $525 to her MMRC and savings resources.[48] Lastly, Catterina may have received financial, as well as cash-in-kind, support in Domegge—for reasons of self-interest, as well as kindness: the costs for long-term care of a mother and her five children likely exceeded resources necessary to help support their return to the United States. Whatever monies may have been forthcoming from pre-explosion savings or Domegge relatives, these would have supplemented the estimated $925 from the remaining MMRC ($400) and Fairmont Coal funds ($525), which would account for Catterina's ability to purchase the Monongah house.[49] In whatever way, Catterina realized a place for her children to live, it was with an acumen not normally associated with a "disturbed" woman. This house, in turn, provided a resource for her to cultivate crops, take in laundry, scavenge coal, and maintain an independence, long nursed by her resolve.

Catterina's post-explosion travails, commencing with the loss of her husband and likely a child and dependency on $4.50 a week, through international travel, and ending in the return to Monongah, took less than a year and a half. The experience of these various and serious ordeals, within such a period of time, may implicate long-term traumatic effects—if coal-carrying is the only concern needing explaining and Catterina's biography is left unexplored. Treating coal-collecting as Catterina's essential action, limited understanding and enabled memories that mocked her. Post-explosion events in Catterina's life offered severe challenges, that goaded, but did not incapacitate, her; she overcame those trials, shown by the purchase of a home, near her Vittorio. The subsequent decades of her life, as well as the post-explosion months, validate her character and point to actions very different from those entailed in the lore of her "crazy" coal-carrying and its personification in a syndicated cartoon.

Catterina's Monongah property held more than a pile of coal; it held a vegetable garden whose products were used. Her care and cultivation of this garden and the collecting and processing of its harvest illustrate Catterina's dedicated endurance, honed—not overwhelmed—by her past ordeals. She ground corn for polenta,

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[48]Todd, 20.
[49]MMRC.

preserved tomatoes, and kept chickens; for cash, she took in laundry and, to save money, among other things, cut the children's hair, "with a bowl over their heads"—all interrelated, focused, and disciplined efforts for her family's survival.[50] As one who knew her said, "the only thing she cared about, her natural instincts were to take care of her family."[51] As they matured, her elder sons hunted rabbits to supplement the products of Catterina's labors. This effort and interdependence does not substantiate trauma; it demonstrates fortitude, possibly nurtured by Catterina's daily trips to the mine.

Catterina was a "real bitty thing," who carried her sack, "always on her right shoulder," with a "dust cap" covering her head, and "clod hoppers" on her feet. Neighbors, and owners of a local store, provided packing sacks for Catterina when hers was worn.[52] She walked to the mine, at least once in the morning and in the afternoon, a regimen as thorough as her maintenance of her garden and other life-sustaining efforts. Catterina went to the tipple, a structure used for loading coal onto trains; there, she gathered pieces from the ground that fell in the loading process and from bits of coal thrown down with slate.[53] This provided Catterina a continuous supply over the decades. She walked the same pathway, at least once in the morning and once in the afternoon, a pathway that remained trodden decades after her death, likely effected by use, not mystery.[54]

Still, Catterina's daily trips to the tipple became an enigma for conjecture—an action often of ill consequences for women. Whether burned by priests, committed by husbands, or admitted by clinicians, speculation preceded and justified the suffering of women. Hypotheses that abetted misery met more the standards of hearsay than science, canons of unconfirmed assumptions. Scholars of the treatment of witches, wives, or the insane, often conclude with a jaundiced eye turned to the speculator-labelers who inflicted maltreatment.[55] So, too, Catterina's behavior was accompanied by local speculation and hurt.

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[50] Demary 2007–2012; Shenasky; Davia, James; Davia, Ronald.
[51] Demary, 2012.
[52] Shenasky.
[53] Demary, 2012.
[54] "Strange as it Seems" is likely in error in citing four daily trips.
[55] Conrad *Deviance* 42–44, 49; Roth and Lerner; Conrad *Medicalization*.

Etiology may not endorse simple sequences and a lone actor is not the agency of enigma. When a small, foreign, woman, shabbily dressed, wearing man-like shoes, scavenges for her family to heat the house and cook the food, and carries coal in a burlap bag, she may be prohibited, taunted, and called a donkey—"ciuccia." That small and gritty woman, from impoverished mountains, endured prohibitions and taunts to feed her children and collect fuel for life-sustaining heat. Still, taunts, like unrecognizable body parts, burdened her spirit and soul, in ways heavier than the coal in her sack. Responses to her practical efforts shaped her, as much as her material exigencies. She collected fuel from materials left by the wayside, a common behavior among the poor, and received hurt.[56] Her presence and the presence of a large coal pile in her yard were sufficient, like signs for witches, to speculate, judge, and harm her. But who, without want, without Catterina's personal history, can say how much coal is enough?

Effort is what Catterina knew and effort is what mobilized her; efforts for her family and efforts for her Vittorio—not misplaced reverence at a misplaced grave site. Daily, and shorter, walks to the cemetery would have earned her the label "pious" but she would have disowned her heart. She fit her walks to other daily responsibilities and faced some town folks. During her trips to the mine, Catterina met aggressive, polyglot, taunts in Italian and Polish, as well as English. She responded to this torment with the same vigor that enabled her to marshal her children through much travel and travail. Catterina threw coal at harassing culprits and, on some occasions, chased them. She was reported to have toppled a coal superintendent off the plank on which he was sitting when he told her she was trespassing and could not take any coal; her spunk was apparently successful for it was said the "super" left her alone after that incident.[57] Catterina did what poor people of pride and vigor do when their needs are threatened and their dignity defamed. With all that Catterina had experienced, these taunting rebukes were not able to extinguish her grit, nor, more amazing still, her civility, which remained, at least for civil persons. On visits to Catterina's house with her mother, a neighbor recalls, "she hugged me," "she offered me

[56]Gabaccia *From Sicily* 88–98.

[57]DeMary; Shenasky; Davia, James.

milk," "she gave me a tomato," "she gave me an ear of corn." She recalls the geniality of Catterina's children, the friendliness of "the middle child," the long-standing acquaintance with the second, and a conversation with Catterina's daughter, who, on a return visit to Monongah, told the neighbor she "missed her mom." This neighbor spoke of her father's camaraderie with Catterina's boys and, when she reflected on her feelings for Catterina, said, "I really loved her."[58] Another person, who spent his summers near Catterina's house, also affirmed the family's civility but said they were "to themselves."[59] Catterina's children learned, from the death of their father and treatment of their mother, to the trials of foreign travel and an uncertain welcome to Ellis Island, that personal wariness was an element of survival. They also learned from Catterina that civility was worth keeping. Personal wariness and demands for survival limited the family's social intercourse but civility prohibited social isolation, encouraged compassion, and aided a future. Contrasted with the callousness in the surveyors' visit to house number 120, is the benevolence of a company boss (a "super"), who threatened job loss for miners who continued to harass Catterina during her daily walks; also, is the benevolence of a Fairmont family that took into their home Faustina, Catterina's daughter.[60] This allowed her daughter to attend high school, graduate with honors, go to Fairmont State Normal School, and on to West Virginia University and a teaching career.[61] While Faustina lived in Fairmont, Catterina's boys stayed home. Her first three sons went to work in the coal mines at early ages, which enabled the last child, Eugenio (James) to remain in school. Eugenio excelled in sports and academics; he became an accomplished baseball player and completed medical school. The eldest son, Oreste, remained single and stayed with Catterina until she died in 1936; they are buried side-by-side on the periphery of the Italian cemetery in Monongah. Giordano and Kipling left Monongah and spent their work years in Ohio, in the rubber and chemical industries.[62]

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[58]Shenasky.
[59]DeMary, 2007.
[60]DeMary. Shenasky. Unable to identify the family.
[61]The Mound 102.
[62]Davia, James; Davia, Ronald.

This research makes it difficult to accept Catterina's daily coal-carrying as evidence that she "lost her mind," unless we also accept domestic discipline and neighborly civility as evidence of a lost mind. Catterina, taunted for her coal-carrying but not for her domestic chores, responded selectively to this selective torment. Yet, when a poor woman defends herself, this can be viewed as another indication of an ascribed pathology—while no pathology may be ascribed to the folks who provoked her. In retrospect, it seems almost evil to taunt a person on an inoffensive routine, especially when it may be an expression of survival, independence, and homage. So, it is a challenge to isolate the effects of the explosion from the effects of irreverent town folks. We may never come to know the logic or passion in Catterina's walks to the mine, but we know the ignorance that stood in the way of her journeys and, for so long, understanding her. Sadly, too many other immigrant women, treated as a *ciuccia,* a donkey with "no intelligence," "not very good sense," "an insane temper," or a "lost mind," will not have their characters so revealed and restored.

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